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## BOOKS AND THE BOOK WORLD

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SECTION  
SIX

# Rider Haggard, Awful Example

He Has Written Another Novel, "Love Eternal," and the War Came Along and He Put It In, Forgetting, However, to Take Anything Out

RIDER HAGGARD is what Booth Tarkington calls one of the most author authors alive. He has written a Parliamentary blue book with a title so long that we cannot devote space to its reproduction here. It is about Salvation Army colonies in the U. S. A. (not the Union of South Africa, either). Then he wrote a book about Uetawayo—our inventory is not chronological—and seven books on economics and social problems (Col. Roosevelt likes 'em) and about a dozen novels, and two—or is it three!—dozen "romances." She is one of the romances; so is *King Solomon's Mines*, which incautiously we read as a small boy just before bedtime. What a night! Oh, what a night!

Sir Rider—he's a knight, you know, a "parfit gentil knight" with whom Chaucer would have been satisfied and who could have given the author of the *Canterbury Tales* cards and spades in a game of storytelling—Sir Rider has now written another novel, called *Love Eternal*, which pleased the *London Times* and maybe satisfied King George that the knight-hood had been decently bestowed. Maybe. Anything is possible in the world we live in, and so it is possible that English novel readers went breathlessly through *Love Eternal* from kiver to kiver. Ourselves, we have proceeded faithfully but without much speed. We walked, we did not run, to the nearest exit, which was on page 368.

For Sir Rider has done a dreadful thing, he has set himself up as an Awful Example to every young writer. They will read him—the young writers—conscientiously and with a high, stern sense of duty animating their every resolve. Three resolves to a chapter will carry you through the twenty-one chapters.

### Why Rider Will Be Read.

And why will the young writers read Sir Rider? To learn how to write, silly. You don't suppose they'll read *Love Eternal* for fun, do you? Nor to learn anything about witchcraft, demonology, superstition, immortality, how to win the war, what Sir Rider thinks of religion, what Sir Rider thinks of some clergymen, what Sir Rider thinks of big male bullies, &c.? What do the young writers care about these things? Nothing. They can find all about witchcraft and demonology elsewhere with less painful exertion by reading articles in encyclopedias or the sermons of Cotton Mather. They don't care what Sir Rider thinks about religion or male bullies because they have their own sets of thoughts on these subjects. They might read *Love Eternal* to find out how to win the war, but if they do they will be disappointed, or else will come away with a deep conviction that the way to win the war is to send your hero first to India and then to France and then—Here, here; *Love Eternal* may be a mighty inferior novel, but it is a novel and it will have readers who will not thank us if we spill the story to them in advance.

Some of it, of course, it is perfectly proper to impart. Know then by these presents (copies of *Love Eternal* "for editorial use") that the novel starts with a first page which lifts you up to the heights and wraps you in the mists of the pre-primeval past. "Æons ago," and all that sort of thing. You



get the impression that love is rather a long standing phenomenon in the world's history. People loved when he was a tadpole and she was a fish in the antediluvian habitat which, carefully and scientifically reconstructed, you may view at the American Museum of Natural History, hours—what are the hours? One never knows the hours at these institutions.

It's a great first page. It has lift and grandeur. We say it at the risk of being misunderstood in London, where a lift is an elevator. Sir Rider starts in the best style of his best romances, and with breathlessness you turn the page only to find that his name was Godfrey Knight and hers Isobel Blake, and to dip into the singularly uninteresting history of the ground on which stands, for fictive purposes, Blake Hall.

### Ooo! A Witch Woman!

Well, to get on, Godfrey Knight had only a father, and a meaner soul never lived. He was a clergyman. For a clergyman's son Godfrey was a surprisingly well behaved youngster. We don't mean that he didn't drink, smoke or swear—later he smoked a pipe exclusively—but he was kind to Isobel and never pulled her hair. Undoubtedly it was because her father was almost as mean a devil as Godfrey's, though in quite a different way. He was always browbeating his gentle, little wife. Isobel stood up to him, rather. As if the hatred of her father wasn't enough, she incurred the hate of Godfrey's, who saw in her a child unafraid of him.

The Rev. Mr. Knight—have to give him his handle—shipped Godfrey away to Switzerland, to a clergyman named Boiset, a pasteur as, for some in-

scrutable reason, Sir Rider prefers to designate him. Pastor would have been as good or better. The pasteurization of Godfrey is about as pleasant as any part of the novel. Not very exciting, this beaming old Swiss, but restful and human. You accept him easily. What you don't accept easily is Madame Riennes. But to arrive at her we must go back.

On the way to Switzerland Godfrey had made the acquaintance of a Mrs. Ogilvy who, being interested in such matters, discovered the boy to be clairvoyant. She used to get him over to her fine house at Lucerne on Sunday afternoons, and there Madame Riennes looked him in the eyes and Godfrey lost consciousness for an hour or two. Madame Riennes was doing her spiritual best to kill Mrs. Ogilvy, an unpardonable enterprise in which she finally succeeded. Mrs. Ogilvy left all her money, or nearly all, to Godfrey, and in such form that his father couldn't lay hold of it. Just before she died Godfrey's friend warned him to keep away from Madame Riennes, but the boy would never have been able to do so had he not confided in the stout old Pastor Boiset. The scene in which the pastor accompanies Godfrey to Madame Riennes's den and routs the witch utterly is somewhere near the level of Sir Rider Haggard's best. The picture of the spectacled, breathless, flaming old clergyman with his feet planted firmly on the crushed chest of the Madame's favorite mummy while Godfrey sneezes from mummy dust and the Madame raves is good.

Isobel, Isobel, where is Isobel? Home, where her mother is dying or gone to Mexico with her uncle, the British Ambassador; just before he left England Godfrey saw something that estranged him from her, and though she did write to him Godfrey's father grabbed the letter and locked it up in a drawer in the parsonage. So she thought he wanted nothing to do with her, and they were parted, as is inevitable. Sir Rider goes to some pains to explain the long separation and to make the utter absence of communication less implausible. He doesn't make out particularly well.

Such a mess of dulness and bizarreness and moralizing and nonsense as Sir Rider Haggard has compounded in *Love Eternal* has not come to our attention in many, many months. The story is quite meaningless, but that would not matter at all if it were entertaining. It is not entertaining, and that would not be anything to shed tears about if it exposed any useful purpose, however ineffectively. It is not a novel because it is devoid of truth, amusement, purpose. Anything of a certain length which serves one or more of those objects, incapable or not, is entitled to be called a novel. *Love Eternal* is not.

And now do you see why we say that the parfit gentil knight has set an Awful Example? Think of the harm he may do, not to readers, but to writers! It is necessary to devote the front page of *Books and the Book World* to a very bad book, occasionally; as necessary as to devote it to very good books the main part of the time. The verdict is guilty.

LOVE ETERNAL. By H. RIDER HAGGARD. Longmans, Green & Co. \$1.50.